

EXCERPT

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365

DEVOTIONALS

to encourage and challenge you



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NEW WINE

"Taste and see that the Lord is good..." said the psalmist in **Psalms 34:8**. If this is our message to the world, in some ways implying that they are to savor His presence "served" to them by us! In other words, our words and actions and attitudes can help people around us glean a sampling of God's goodness, much like vendors sometimes give our free samples of the food they are selling.

I personally enjoy wine-tasting and olive-oil tasting, both of which are (*coincidentally?*) biblical images. For example, the Hebrew word "Gethsemane" means olive press, which speaks to us of how suffering and affliction produces in us the finest oil imaginable. You can read about the experience of Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane in three of the gospels : **Matthew 26:36-46**, **Mark 14:32-42** and **Luke 22:40-46**. The prophet Zechariah had a vision of the two sources of "olive oil" in the world today : The Church and Israel. "And a second time I answered and said to him, "What are these two branches of the olive trees, which are beside the two golden pipes from which the golden oil is poured out?" He said to me, "Do you not know what these are?" I said, "No, my lord." Then he said, "These are the two anointed ones who stand by the Lord of the whole earth." (**Zechariah 4:12-14**).

The other symbol of the Holy Spirit is wine, and new wine in particular suggests a fresh outpouring. It is mentioned, for example, in **Isaiah 65:8** - "Thus says the Lord: "As the new wine is found in the cluster, and they say, 'Do not destroy it, for there is a blessing in it,' so I will do for my servants' sake, and not destroy them all." In the New Testament, Jesus speaks of new wine needing a new wineskin, meaning that present-day structures and containers must be renewed and ready for a new move of God : "No one puts a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment, for the patch tears away from the garment, and a worse tear is made. Neither is new wine put into old wineskins. If it is, the skins burst and the wine is spilled and the skins are destroyed. But new wine is put into fresh wineskins, and so both are preserved." (**Matthew 9:16-17**) But practically speaking, in both cases, the personal application is that we have to remain flexible in the hands of the Lord, and that we recognized that when we are "pressed", it will bring out what's on the inside of us : either the fresh oil or the new wine of the Holy Spirit, or the very worst of our carnal nature.

As you reflect on these things, and cherish what the Lord is doing in your life, remember that His ultimate goal is to give to this world, through you, a taste of His goodness : <https://youtu.be/ULzd85NbWpQ> (« O Taste and See » by Brian and Jenn Johnson).

A TOUCH OF GENTLENESS

One of the oft-neglected attributes of the Lord our God is the gentleness He possesses, with which He speaks to us at times, and with which He delicately operates on our hearts when we are hurting. David's song of deliverance spoke of this attribute : **2 Samuel 22:36**

"You have given me the shield of your salvation, and your gentleness made me great." (quoted in **Psalms 18:35**). The apostle Paul describes his ministry in this way : in **2 Corinthians 10:1** - "I, Paul, myself entreat you, by the meekness and **gentleness of Christ**—I who am humble when face to face with you, but bold toward you when I am away!"

Later on, in **Galatians 6:1**, he entreats the Christians to behave in the same way : "Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted." He reiterates this in his exhortation for unity to the church at Ephesus, saying "I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." (**Ephesians 4:1-3**) Furthermore, Paul teaches his disciple Timothy to intentionally and consistently run after this quality when he wrote :"But as for you, O man of God, flee these things. Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, **gentleness**." (**1 Timothy 6:11**) Isn't it ironic that the very next sentence says "Fight the good fight of the faith." ? How do we reconcile the two seemingly opposite attitudes : the gentleness of demeanor with the aggressiveness of combat?

The key is knowing who we are standing before. Towards our fellow man, as the scriptures have said, we are to maintain a spirit of gentleness, even when we have to bring a word of correction or reproof. Granted, not everyone may deserve our kindness or docility, particularly angry, impatient people. But responding in the same way simply adds fuel to the fire. It is not recommended nor befitting for an ambassador for Christ. In fact, **Proverbs 15:1** says "A **soft answer** turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger." Paul developed this notion even more : "Have nothing to do with foolish, ignorant controversies; you know that they breed quarrels. And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, **correcting his opponents with gentleness**. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will." (**2 Timothy 2:23-26**)

Peter goes into even more detail : "But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; **yet do it with gentleness** and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil." (**1 Peter 3:14-17**)

However, when confronting our spiritual enemies, there is no place for clemency, mercy or leniency! No peace treaties with Satan, nor his demons! Jesus taught : "From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force." (**Matthew 11:12**) If we remain on our knees before His throne, then we will remain standing strong before our adversary. If we remain respectful and honorable before those who are created in the image of God, even if they make bad decisions, then we will uprightly before our Creator. This has its rewards! "For the Lord God is a sun and shield; the Lord bestows favor and honor. No good thing does he withhold from those who walk uprightly." (**Psalms 84:11**)

Worship the Lord with this song as you think about that : <https://youtu.be/y1RQciil7B0> (« Touch the Sky » by Hillsong United)

PRECIOUS PROMISES FROM A PRECIOUS FATHER

When you skip over important one-liners in the Bible, you can miss a deep revelation. For example, in **John 11:40** - "Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?" God wants to change our way of thinking and our way of walking with Him. He is seeking a people who hang onto His promises... who believe

His promises who recognize and release the real power of His promises ... who have His promises engraved on their hearts...who respond to the challenges of life with His promises on their lips!

His promises have the power to PROTECT and to CREATE. They reveal the NATURE of God and the PLAN of God. They are not to be taken lightly! **1 Kings 8:56** - ““Blessed be the Lord who has given rest to his people Israel, according to all that he promised. **Not one word has failed of all his good promise**, which he spoke by Moses his servant.” (also **Isaiah 55:10-11** - “For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me void, but accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.”)

God CANNOT lie (**Titus 1:2**), so when He makes a promise it will come to pass! The words He speaks are not in vain.

WHY does God always keep His promises? Because **they reveal His nature** to humanity! His promises are given not just to bless us, but also to show the world His goodness, His faithfulness, His truthfulness, His integrity, etc.

And ultimately, Jesus Himself is the fulfillment of all of the Father's promises to His children :“For I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God's truthfulness, **in order to confirm the promises** given to the patriarchs, and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy.”(**Romans 15:8-9**) “For no matter how many promises God has made, they are “Yes” in Christ. And so through him the “Amen” is spoken by us to the glory of God.” (**2 Corinthians 1:20**). Here's a song that will help you meditate on God's faithfulness and on His promises to you! <https://youtu.be/ITQnbOihe3Y> (« Yes and Amen » by Chris Tomlin)

JESUS REMAINS ON THE THRONE

To take His place on the throne, Jesus had to endure the cross. In the same way, it is by living a crucified life that we can rule and reign over our circumstances without being overcome. So many of the scriptures in the New Testament help us visualise our majestic, authoritative, victorious King in his heavenly royalty ! We would do well to keep our eyes on Him in every situation : "...look unto Jesus the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising shame, and hath sat down at the right hand of **the throne of God. (Hebrews 12:2)**

Hebrews 1:8 - But about the Son he says, “Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever; a sceptre of justice will be the sceptre of your kingdom.”

Revelation 3:21 - "To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to **sit with me on my throne**, just as I was victorious and sat down with my Father on his throne."

Perhaps the most vivid description of this throne (and what's going on all around it) is in the Book of Revelation : "At once I was in the Spirit, and there before me was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it. And the one who sat there had the appearance of jasper and ruby. A rainbow that shone like an emerald encircled the throne. Surrounding the throne were twenty-four other thrones, and seated on them were twenty-four elders.

They were dressed in white and had crowns of gold on their heads. From the throne came flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder. In front of the throne, seven lamps were blazing. These are the seven spirits of God. Also in front of the throne there was what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal. In the center, around the throne, were four living creatures, and they were covered with eyes, in front and in back. The first living creature was like a lion, the second was like an ox, the third had a face like a man, the fourth was like a flying eagle. Each of the four living creatures had six wings and was covered with eyes all around, even under its wings. Day and night they never stop saying: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty,' who was, and is, and is to come." Whenever the living creatures give glory, honor and thanks to him who sits on the throne and who lives for ever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall down before him who sits on the throne and worship him who lives for ever and ever. They lay their crowns before the throne and say: You are worthy, our Lord and God..." (Rev. 4:2-11)

Let's join our voices to those of the angels and elders around the throne : <https://youtu.be/uPS0pz6r2g0> (« On the Throne » by Kari Jobe)

UPRIGHTLY

Despite being a most horrendous instrument of death, the cross speaks of the two dimensions of the Christian life : the vertical connection between heaven and earth (us and our Father) and the horizontal connection we have with each other. A synonym for vertical is upright, so when the Bible teaches us to walk uprightly, it's basically telling us to stay connected to heaven! This gives us a whole new understanding on how to walk uprightly in the following examples :

1. Moses instructed his co-leaders : And at that time I gave orders to your judges, saying, Let all questions between your brothers come before you for hearing, and **give decisions uprightly** between a man and his brother or one from another nation who is with him. (**Deuteronomy 1:16**) "For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, strong in power and greatly to be feared, who has no respect for any man's position and takes no rewards: Judging uprightly in the cause of the widow and of the child who has no father, and giving food and clothing in his mercy to the man from a strange country." (**Deuteronomy 10:17-18**)
2. Before his death, King David gave this advice to his son Solomon : "I am going the way of all the earth: so be strong and be a man; And keep the orders of the Lord your God, walking in his ways, keeping his laws and his orders and his rules and his words, as they are recorded in the law of Moses; so that you may do well in all you do and wherever you go, So that the Lord may give effect to what he said of me, If your children give attention to their ways, **living uprightly before me** with all their heart and their soul, you will never be without a man to be king in Israel." (**1 Kings 2:2-4**)
3. The Lord Himself repeated nearly word for word what David said : "As for you, if you will go on your way before me, as David your father did, **uprightly and with a true heart**, doing what I have given you orders to do, keeping my laws and my decisions; Then I will make the seat of your rule over Israel certain for ever, as I gave my word to David your father, saying, You will never be without a man to be king in Israel." (**1 Kings 9:4-5**)
4. **Psalm 15:1-2** teaches us "Lord, who may have a resting-place in your tent, a living-place on your holy hill? **He who goes on his way uprightly**, doing righteousness, and saying what is true in his heart..."

5. God repeatedly sent prophets to Israel to speak to their government : "This is what the Lord has said: Do what is right, judging uprightly, and make free from the hands of the cruel one him whose goods have been violently taken away: do no wrong and be not violent to the man from a strange country and the child without a father and the widow, and let not those who have done no wrong be put to death in this place." (**Jeremiah 22:3**) "See, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will give to David a true Branch, and he will be ruling as king, acting wisely, doing what is right, and judging uprightly in the land." (**Jeremiah 23:5**) "This is what the Lord has said: Let this be enough for you, O rulers of Israel: let there be an end of violent behaviour and wasting; do what is right, judging uprightly; let there be no more driving out of my people, says the Lord." (**Ezekiel 45:9**)
6. Notice the connection between living uprightly and increasing in the knowledge of God in Paul's exhortations : "For this reason, we, from the day when we had word of it, keep on in prayer for you, that you may be full of the knowledge of his purpose, with all wisdom and experience of the Spirit, **living uprightly in the approval of the Lord**, giving fruit in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God..." (**Colossians 1:9-10**) "For the grace of God has come, giving salvation to all men, Training us so that, turning away from evil and the desires of this world, **we may be living wisely and uprightly in the knowledge of God** in this present life..." (**Titus 2:11-12**)

Use this song to help walk uprightly and have a heart like heaven today : <https://youtu.be/CbbezHvRLDA> (« Heart like Heaven » by Hillsong United)

TRIALS CAN BECOME TRIUMPHS

Have you ever wondered why we flee trials rather than embrace them? Why we complain about tribulation rather than recognizing their power in our lives? It's almost as though we mentally take an eraser and delete important scriptures on the subject, such as **Romans 8:28-31** - "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to his purpose. For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestined, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified. What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, **who can be against us?**"

Notice the confidence in the language....and the proper reaction we are meant to have! **Don't be surprised if God allow you to go through trials.** Your heavenly Father is not doing it because He is mean or cold or heartless, because He specifically said ALL THINGS work together for your good. And notice the criteria mentioned : 1) Those that LOVE GOD and 2) Those who are called according to His purpose.

According to this passage, His ultimate goal is to **conform us to the image of Christ**. Even Jesus went through trials before his ultimate victory : rejection, betrayal, crucifixion. As we have previously seen, **He was on cross BEFORE He was on the throne**. So we, too, go through TRIALS before TRIUMPH. The power of the trial is in the fact that it exposes our fears, which are usually weaknesses exploited by the enemy, and in this way removes sin and compromise and vulnerability. In other words, in His great goodness and wisdom and faithfulness, God takes the initiative to reveal in us what can cause our destruction. **THE POWER OF THE TRIAL IS OUR TRANSFORMATION!**

But here are the typical mistakes we make during trials :

- We lament, "Why is this happening, Lord? Don't you love me? Have you forgotten me? Have you abandoned me?" This is where self-pity can be a huge trap.
- We complain, we whine, we mope, we make ourselves victims.
- We lose our confidence. Instead of allowing trials to STRENGTHEN our faith, we let them WEAKEN our faith.
- We focus on the difficulty and not the goal. Example : How are you doing? "It's terrible right now" instead of "God is using many things in my life to make me more like Jesus!" So... practically speaking, what are we to do in trials? We are in fact equipped to face them!

1) Love your enemies and pray for them : **Luke 6:27-28**. Love is your protection.

2) Maintain your confidence in God : **Jeremiah 20:12-13** - "But, O Lord of hosts, testing the upright and seeing the thoughts and the heart, let me see your punishment come on them; for I have put my cause before you. Make melody to the Lord, give praise to the Lord: for he has made the soul of the poor man free from the hands of the evil-doers."

3) Exercise your authority and renounce lies. **John 8:32** - "You shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free." The devil uses lies to feed your fears. Laugh instead of cry. Truth will make you laugh but lies will make you cry. What is feeding your present? Is it your past, where most of the devil's lies have been sown into your heart? Or is it your future the truth of God's promises come alive?

4) Know that every trial will bear fruit : **Romans 5:3-5** - "Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. **James 1:3-4** - "Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing." YOUR FRUIT DEPENDS ON YOUR ATTITUDE. The power is released when you focus your eyes not on the circumstances but on the One who is moving in and through your life. He is FOR YOU. He is working IN YOUR FAVOUR. Close your eyes in the situation and SEE JESUS. You have the power to turn your eyes upon Him. <https://youtu.be/L57ox0iQU7A> (« Turn Your Eyes » by Lauren Daigle)

A TEST BRINGS OUT THE BEST

Most students fear tests, but they were actually designed to help you discern what you have mastered. The same is true about the tests that the Lord leads you through!

Tests from the Lord are not punishment, He simply wants to save us from ourselves, so He will prune us through our tests. For example : I like having long fingernails but to me, a piano player, they're useless. In fact, besides removing what is useless from our lives, God uses our tests in other surprising ways!

1. **Tests can reveal** what is hidden in our hearts. Example : bitterness. **Hebrews 12:15** - See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no "root of bitterness" springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled..." God often tests me in a particular area of weakness : my tendency to want to please men. This is related to pride, and fears and insecurities.
2. **Tests can place you strategically** to accomplish the purposes of God (but you don't necessarily see it right away). God may be wanting to put you in the right place at the right time to release His redemption. Think about Joseph being sold into slavery by

his brothers, then as a servant in Potiphar's house, who was a man of high position in Pharaoh's house. After that, he was unjustly thrown into prison...but because of the grace of God on his life He becomes a counsellor to Pharaoh! (Read the story in Genesis chapters 27, and 39-41) God wanted to increase Joseph's sphere of influence. **Genesis 50:20** - "And as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, to bring to pass the salvation of many people, as you see today." GOD'S PLAN IS SO MUCH BIGGER!

3. **Tests can lead to an extraordinary encounter with God.** Think about Moses, being banished to the desert after killing the Egyptian. One day he is taking care of Jethro's sheep and he comes across a burning bush where he meets the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. YOU ARE MEANT TO BE A BURNING BUSH FOR THIS GENERATION! (Read **Exodus chapter 3**).
4. **Tests can reveal Jesus in a whole new way to you.** You've been crying out to know the Lord, to see the Lord. Sometimes a trial is an answer to your prayer. In Daniel chapter 3, Daniel's three friends are thrown into a fiery furnace because they refused to bow down to an idol! **Daniel 3:25** - "He answered and said, "But I see four men unbound, walking in the midst of the fire, and they are not hurt; and the appearance of the fourth is like a son of the gods." **3:27** - "And the satraps, the prefects, the governors, and the king's counselors gathered together and saw that the fire had not had any power over the bodies of those men. The hair of their heads was not singed, their cloaks were not harmed, and no smell of fire had come upon them." Not even the smell of smoke! " (speaking of FIRE: see **Malachi 3:2-3**)
5. **Tests can release miracles :** Daniel in the lion's den. His only crime was praying! **Daniel 6:13-23** - V. 16 "Then the king commanded, and Daniel was brought and cast into the den of lions. The king declared to Daniel, "May your God, whom you serve continually, deliver you!" V. 22 "My God sent his angel and shut the lions' mouths, and they have not harmed me, because I was found blameless before him; and also before you, O king, I have done no harm." **1 Peter 5:8-10** - Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walks about, seeking whom he may devour: Be in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world. But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, establish, strengthen, settle you."

If you find yourself in a furnace or a lion's den today, close your eyes and allow this song to minister to you : <https://youtu.be/OiirKDvMjNY> (« The Garden » by Kari Jobe)

WHY GOD HIDES HIS FACE

David realized the desperation of a people that did not walk in the light of God's countenance : **Psalm 10:10-12** - "The helpless are crushed, sink down, and fall by his might. He says in his heart, "God has forgotten, **he has hidden his face**, he will never see it." Arise, O LORD; O God, lift up your hand; forget not the afflicted."

Compare this to the righteous : **Psalm 24:4-6** - "He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to what is false and does not swear deceitfully. He will receive blessing from the LORD and righteousness from the God of his salvation. Such is the generation of those who seek him, who seek the face of the God of Jacob. Selah."

The thought of meeting God face to face is scary for anyone who has any sense of reverence for the Lord (or who has seen *Indiana Jones!*) Do you remember the initial encounter that Moses had with the presence of God in **Exodus 3:6**? "Moreover he said, I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. And Moses hid his face; for he was afraid to look upon God."

However, as Moses persevered and grew in understanding, things changed : **Exodus 34:29** - "When Moses came down from Mount Sinai, with the two tablets of the testimony in his hand as he came down from the mountain, Moses did not know that **the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God.**"

As this relationship progressed, the Aaronic blessing captured the true purpose of God's face : **Numbers 6:24-26** - "The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace."

Unfortunately, our disobedience causes God to hide His face. This is why the best course of action when you don't "feel" His presence is to search your heart for anything that would be displeasing to Him. We see a shadow of this truth in the Old Testament, **Deuteronomy 31:17** - "Then my anger will be kindled against them in that day, and I will forsake them and **hide my face from them**, and they will be devoured. And many evils and troubles will come upon them, so that they will say in that day, Have not these evils come upon us because our God is not among us?"

Fortunately, God is a God of covenant, and those who know this appeal to His lovingkindness to restore their relationship with Him. **2 Chronicles 6:41-42** "Now therefore arise, O God, into thy resting-place, thou, and the ark of thy strength: let thy priests, O Jehovah God, be clothed with salvation, and let thy saints rejoice in goodness. O God, turn not away the face of thine anointed: remember thy lovingkindnesses to David thy servant."

Know that your Heavenly Father's greatest pleasure is for you to be able to enjoy communion with Him that is heart-to-heart and face-to-face. Use this time to meditate on the goodness and faithfulness of God, to seek His face, and to contemplate the magnificent beauty of the God you serve. <https://youtu.be/VH1LRyIX1fk> (« I Seek Your Face » by Sahar Twesigye)

STANDING FIRM

An old English word rarely used today, which means "resolutely or dutifully firm and unwavering", is the adjective "**steadfast**", originating from two words meaning "stand firm." Think about a tree: the deeper the roots go, the more stable it is. So every time we read the word "**steadfast**" in the scriptures, let's remind ourselves that to remain so requires our roots to be deep in God. Consider the following examples, all taken from the New International Version : (*because in the English Standard Version, the word appears 218 times, which exceeds the scope of our study today!*)

1. God can restore and renew our steadfastness : **Psalm 51:10** "Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a **steadfast spirit** within me."

2. A steadfast heart releases praise and worship to God : **Psalm 57:7** - "My heart, O God, is steadfast, **my heart is steadfast**; I will sing and make music." **Psalm 108:1** - "My heart, O God, is steadfast; I will sing and make music with all my soul."
3. A steadfast heart is free from fear and unwavering in trust : **Psalm 112:6-7** - "Surely the righteous will never be shaken; they will be remembered forever. They will have no fear of bad news; **their hearts are steadfast**, trusting in the Lord."
4. We can pray to be steadfast : **Psalm 119:2-6** - "Blessed are those who keep his statutes and seek him with all their heart; they do no wrong but follow his ways. You have laid down precepts that are to be fully obeyed. Oh, **that my ways were steadfast in obeying your decrees!** Then I would not be put to shame when I consider all your commands."
5. Steadfastness applies to every area of our lives : **Proverbs 4:23-27** - "Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it. Keep your mouth free of perversity; keep corrupt talk far from your lips. Let your eyes look straight ahead; fix your gaze directly before you. Give careful thought to the paths for your feet and **be steadfast in all your ways**. Do not turn to the right or the left; keep your foot from evil."
6. Steadfastness is the key to living a peaceful life : **Isaiah 26:3-4** - "You will keep in perfect peace **those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in you**. Trust in the Lord forever, for the Lord, the Lord himself, is the Rock eternal."
7. God's unending grace contributes to our steadfastness : **1 Peter 5:8-11** - "Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. **Resist him, standing firm** in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings. And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and **make you strong, firm and steadfast**. To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen."

Although I am not skilled at yoga, there are many different exercises that are used to reinforce strength and to train your body to stay balanced and solidly grounded in unbelievable positions. It has to do with developing certain muscles. The same can be said of our faith and our spiritual muscles : they can be prepared, through sustained practice and instruction, to remain unwavering. To begin the process, here is a rather "muscular" song to inspire you as you seek to develop strength and balance and steadfastness today : <https://youtu.be/AxTjN9STCpM> (« stand firm in the faith » by Tito Cayamanda, Edwin Cruz & Mimmon Vicente)

MORE THAN A CONQUEROR

God intends us to be overcomers, never victims of our circumstances, or of other people's flaws and tactlessness. Jesus paid the supreme price for us to be able to defeat lies, accusations, insults, unhealthy stress, criticisms...and whatever else the enemy of our souls would try to throw at us. Of course, Satan will try to exploit the weaknesses of those around us to discourage us or demean us, or else he will magnify our own insecurities. But we are by no means destined to be limited or stuck in those ruts.

Romans 16:20 - "And the God of peace shall soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you."

1 John 5:4-5 - "For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?"

Numerous are the precious promises of the Lord our God to those realize their position in Christ and who battle from a place of victory in daily life! For they are not looking at their own strengths or lack thereof, but to the finished work of the cross. One preacher said it like this : "When I look around, I am distressed. When I look at myself, I am depressed. But when I look at Christ, I am at rest."

If we could summarize all the promises that John received and communicated to overcomers of the churches in the book of Revelation, it would look like this :

- To him who overcomes I will give of the fruit of the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God. (**Revelation 2:7**)
- He who overcomes will not come under the power of the second death. (**Revelation 2:11**)
- To him who overcomes I will give of the secret manna, and I will give him a white stone, and on the stone a new name, of which no one has knowledge but he to whom it is given. (**Revelation 2:17**)
- He who overcomes, and keeps my works to the end, to him I will give rule over the nations, And he will be ruling them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of the potter they will be broken, even as I have power from my Father: (**Revelation 2:26-27**)
- Him who overcomes I will make a pillar in the house of my God, and he will go out no more: and I will put on him the name of my God, and the name of the town of my God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from my God, and my new name. (**Revelation 3:12**)
- To him who overcomes I will give a place with me on my high seat, even as I overcame, and am seated with my Father on his high seat. (**Revelation 3:21**)

So here's a good fighting song to stimulate your faith as you fix your eyes on Him who overcame sin and death to give you a place of victory! <https://youtu.be/bv2lsHmbkts> (« Hard Love » by NEEDTOBREATHE)

BEING A BLESSING

You have probably heard it said that we are called to be blessed and to be a blessing. Being a blessings is much deeper than giving a blessing. Being a blessing means knowing how to value and edify people and bring out the best in them. This can remain a vague concept unless we put it into practice on a daily basis. I have found that the same principles that apply to demonstrating love are characteristic of being a blessing. In Hebrew culture, husbands bless their wives (notably during the sabbath meal), parents bless their children, rabbis bless their disciples, and employers bless their employees. There are many different ways to BE a blessing by expressing blessing to others. These include :

1. A significant touch : the patriarchs laid hands on their descendants; Jesus laid hands on the sick.
2. Expressing words of affirmation : Jesus began His correction of the churches in **Revelation chapters 2 and 3** by mentioning what they had done well.
3. Recognizing the value of an individual : On two occasions, our heavenly Father said of Jesus "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well-pleased."
4. Describing a promising future : the prophets spoke of a "future and a hope" reserved for this who came out of the babylonian captivity.
5. Making a real commitment : when our words are followed up by visible actions, we are doing what John wrote, "not loving in word or talk but in deed and in truth." (**1 John 3:18**)

Start with those closest to you. Take an extra minute in a conversation to transmit a blessing. Let it be said of us that we chose to be blessing wherever we went!

<https://youtu.be/NJJR4F3uqEQ> (« The Blessing » by John Waller)

HUMILITY IS NOT OVERRATED

It has been said that humility is not thinking of oneself as so lowly that one no longer has any value; it is simply not thinking on oneself at all! Jesus exemplified humility, but he was by no means a doormat. He simply made His Father's Kingdom and His Father's will His highest priority. His attitude and His lifestyle revealed that self-centredness is counter-productive and not representative of the culture of heaven.

We can learn the following truths about genuine humility :

1. **Humility proceeds honor.** "The fear of the Lord is the instruction of wisdom; and before honor is humility". (**Proverbs 15:33**) "Before destruction the heart of man is haughty, and before honor is humility." (**Proverbs 18:12**) "By humility and the fear of the Lord are riches, and honor, and life." (**Proverbs 22:4**)
2. **Humility ensures our protection :** In the midst of a rebellious people, destined to encounter the wrath of God, the prophet admonished : " Seek the Lord, all you humble of the land, who do his just commands; seek righteousness; seek humility; perhaps you may be hidden on the day of the anger of the Lord." (**Zephaniah 2:3**)
3. **Humility is not a position, but a state of mind :** "And when they were come to him, he said unto them, Ye know, from the first day that I came into Asia, after what manner I have been with you at all seasons, Serving the Lord with all humility of mind, and with many tears, and temptations, which befell me by the lying in wait of the Jews..." (**Acts 20:18-19**)
4. **Humility is a choice :** "In the same way, you who are younger, submit yourselves to your elders. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, "God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble." (**1 Peter 5:5**) The word humility doesn't even appear in the descriptive list of the fruit of the Holy Spirit in **Galatians 5:22-23**!
5. **Humility is expressed through servanthood :** But they kept quiet because on the way they had argued about who was the greatest. Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, "Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all. (**Mark 9:34-35**) "When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. "Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked them. "You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your

Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you." (**John 13:12-15**) Jesus took this task upon Himself; no one asked Him to do it.

A lack of humility can be detected in our attitudes, our actions, and our reactions. Pride can be a subtle yet destructive power in our lives. We shouldn't be surprised if God sovereignly orchestrates circumstances to expose various forms of pride in our lives...He knows how harmful it can be in the long term. Humility pursues reconciliation, whereas pride isolates us from those with whom we are meant to be in a relationship! If the Lord exhorts us to clothe ourselves with humility, it is time to put away our earthly clothes and dress ourselves with heavenly array.

Perhaps the first expression of humility a Christian can experience is when he or she comes to the altar and bows before the Lord in total surrender. Let this song lead you to that place of abandonment : <https://youtu.be/ycWDFd0yCHA> (« O Come To The Altar » by Elevation Worship)

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